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# Spare Us the Sixties

*Life is not a sound track.*

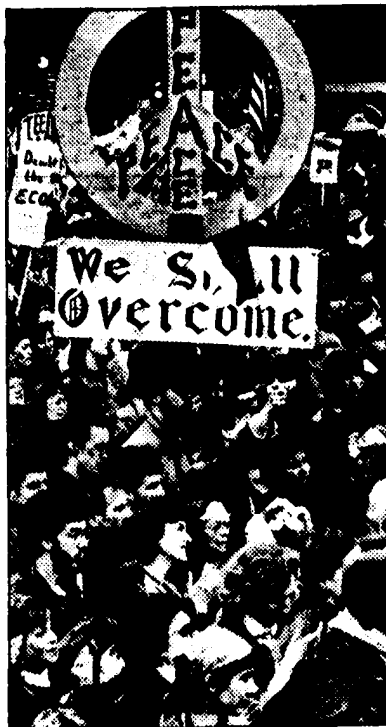
Washington was treated this week to a nostalgic whiff of the Sixties: an antiwar march, a sit-down at CIA headquarters, Daniel Ellsberg, Philip Berrigan. Only Amy Carter, heir to this great tradition, was missing; school obligations intervened, it seems. Right down to the mooning of the CIA (eight bare bottoms spelling N-O R-E-A-G-A-N), the great April 25th Mobilization for Justice and Peace was a melancholy affair, an indication of just how spent is the spirit of the Sixties.

And not just spent, but sold. Bottled and canned. Auctioned off. To whom? To the heroes of the Eighties, the men of enterprise. "The City of New Orleans," a catchy, mellow Arlo Guthrie tune, has now been licensed to General Motors. With a minor change—it is now "The Spirit of Cutlass Ciera"—it moves cars on TV.

Worse, for Sixties' fans, the great Beatles' anthem "Revolution" has been sold to Nike. "Revolution" now moves shoes. For some, this is going too far. Rock critic Chris Morris is quoted (by The New Republic) in particular distress: "It bugs the hell out of me that it has been turned into a shoe ad." Why? Because "when 'Revolution' came out in 1968 I was getting tear-gassed in the streets of Madison. That song is part of the sound track of my political life."

The sound track of my political life. What a lovely phrase, capturing perfectly the mood of Sixties politics: recreation mistaking itself for commitment. "Modernism in the streets," Lionel Trilling called the Sixties youth movement. It has become a music video.

Not much to mourn here, you would think. Think again. Through the haze of the Eighties, Sixties nostalgia grows. We are in a Sixties boomlet. It is not just the miniskirts and antiwar marches. More important is the recent post-*Irangate*, post-*Boesky* celebration of Sixties-style "commitment" and a corresponding disdain of Eighties-style materialism.



BY JAMES A. PARCELL—THE WASHINGTON POST

A sunny Kennedyesque version of this idea (minus any implied criticism of potential voters) is a featured theme of several Democratic presidential candidates, most notably Sen. Joseph Biden. Liberal writers are also yearning for "committed" youth and disgusted with the somnolent, materialistic majority who are not. On the one hand is Amy Carter, hailed by Mary McGrory as the only noncomatose, morally serious kid in America, trying to "rouse her torpid peers from their self-absorption."

On the other hand is Mary (last name withheld), one of a group of Tennessee students found by Haynes Johnson to be shockingly ambitious, money-conscious and advancement-oriented: "Meet Mary, class of '87, member of the cynical society. . . . Mary wants to make it. . . . Like Mary, many have switched majors from liberal arts to business. They plan to get a master of business administration

degree, the better to make it."

I can't quite figure it out. The great cliché of 1987 is competitiveness. Everyone is for it: left, right and neoliberal. On Mondays and Wednesdays, teeth gnash over America's lack of competitiveness. Then, Tuesdays and Thursdays clothes are rent over the ambition and greed of American youth. Keeping up with the Nakasones is a national goal. Keeping up with the Joneses is national disgrace.

You can't have it both ways. A society cannot lionize entrepreneurship and then look down its nose at those who switch from liberal arts to business. It cannot deplore the fact that we turn out lawyers and sociologists while the Japanese turn out engineers and managers, and then consider our young engineers and managers to be sellouts.

We have been losing the competition with the Japanese not for lack of scientific creativity. We are far superior in our technological inventiveness. What we lack is their talent for rote productivity, their grim-faced efficiency, their assembly-line discipline. Americans are not good at singing the company song. Do we really want to compete with the Japanese in business? Then we had better cultivate more green eyeshades. Competitiveness is the pursuit of material values. It will not do then to be shocked to find our youth in hot pursuit.

It is time to get our decades straight. The Nineties have already started, declares Esquire. (It redesigned its magazine to mark the occasion, writes the publisher, to disabuse those who suspect that it declared the occasion to mark the redesign.) And even if the Eighties aren't over yet, they soon will be.

What is to replace them? I don't know. Only Max Headroom knows. But spare us the Sixties. They were fun the first time around, but, as the first Marxist once said, the second time around is farce.